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Sergio Ramirez

'How Can We Not Want Peace?'

With the war in Nicaragua still flaring and elections coming there on Nov. 4 and talks proceeding between Nicaragua and the United States, we cabled some questions to Sergio Ramirez, one of three members of the governing Sandinista junta and its candidate for vice president in the elections. The questions and answers follow.

Q: The administration asserts that the two Americans killed recently in Nicaragua were unpaid volunteers recruited by anti-government forces, and were not American CIA agents. Have you any evidence to the contrary?

A: No U.S. citizen linked to a mercenary organization can enter a military base controlled by military authorities of the government of the United States without the knowledge and consent of those authorities.

Neither can an ordinary citizen, however adventurous he may be, board an armed helicopter to take part in an air operation of a military nature: an operation in which three other planes piloted by military aviators participate, and in which the planes fly in tactical formation to attack an objective in a country that maintains diplomatic relations with the United States.

The two U.S. citizens were not on a camping expedition. They were participating in a war operation very similar to the air attack over the Cosiguina region in Nicaragua several months ago, later known to have been planned and executed by the CIA.

Q: Your government had the opening to make the Nov. 4 elections credible by widening the guarantees to the political opposition and by starting up a dialogue with the armed opposition, which has stated its readiness for such a dialogue. Why did you close this opening? With the three major opposition parties banned and with no dialogue begun, why should any impartial observer consider your elections anything but a farce?

A: We have never linked guarantees for free and just elections in Nicaragua to any dialogue with counterrevolutionaries paid by the CIA. All the electoral guarantees were established despite the war situation imposed on us by a foreign power. Seven political parties have accepted these guarantees and are participating normally in the election process. They are parties of very different ideologies that attempt to attract voters through television, radio and street meetings. We are experiencing a true election process.

The designation of the three parties—led by Arturo Cruz—that decided not to participate as "most representative" has been awarded them from outside, not from inside Nicaragua. It is an external fabrication that attempts to annul the credibility of the elections in Nicaragua. In any case, it must be demonstrated through the electoral channels they decided not to use. I do not

believe that any impartial observer can assert that the elections in Nicaragua are a farce, when nearly 90 percent of qualified citizens have registered to vote.

Q: Will you agree, here and now, that your government will no longer censor La Prensa and that you will end the imprisonment and harassment of all Nicaraguan journalists?

A: The only journalist who was in prison, for having committed crimes punishable by law and not for exercising his profession as a journalist, was liberated this week, thanks to a pardon granted him by the government. There are no journalists in Nicaragua who are imprisoned or persecuted, as can be easily proven.

As for freedom of the press, a simple daily reading of La Prensa will demonstrate how they deal in a scandalous way with all the themes they wish: attacks on the patriotic military service, on the elections themselves, on strikes, on food supplies.

There are few limitations on La Prensa publishing whatever it wishes. The only visible restrictions are those La Prensa places upon itself: until now it has refused to inform its readers that two North American mercenaries died in the air attack on the base at Santa Clara. What is the reason for that? You will have to ask them.

Q: You support the demand that the Salvadoran government talk before elections with the insurgents in El Salvador. Why, then, will you not talk before elections with those in Nicaragua?

A: We are talking with those who manipulate the threads of the aggression against Nicaragua: the United States. It is the United States government that arms and pays the counterrevolutionaries who day by day cause destruction and death in Nicaragua. They are no more than instruments of the Reagan Administration. Three children died in the attack on Santa Clara, and every day children, young people, women are killed. There are children mutilated by bombs, children burned, orphans. This we have to discuss with the Reagan administration and with nobody else. And it is a discussion in which the U.S. people have a deep concern, because it is their tax dollars that are financing these crimes.

Q: Four meetings on the diplomatic level have been reported between the U.S. and Nicaragua since Secretary of State Shultz's visit to Managua on June 1. Where are these negotiations going? Is Nicaragua simply trying to gain time in these negotiations for the American opponents of administration policy, especially the congressional opponents, to press their opposition?

A: In direct conversations with the United States, we are seeking in all seriousness a real possibility for peace. No one wants peace more than we do. We are a small, poor country that exports scarcely \$400 million worth of goods per year: a sum that the United States has already spent in funding the counterrevolutionaries.

How can we not want peace? We are not trying to gain time. Why should we? Everything indicates that

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